

4 - 134

Echo

Labour chief in support of travellers' struggle to stay

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By Jon Austin

A LABOUR politician has thrown her support behind travellers trying to stay at Dale Farm.

Lynda Gordon, Basildon's Labour group leader, has said she supports the 96 families trying to stay on the Crays Hill site or for them to stay in the borough if they are able to move to a new site at Pound Lane, Laindon.

Mrs Gordon pledged her support in an e-mail to Zelda Jeffers, a Basildon campaigner who supports the travellers.

The Labour group has always opposed using bailiffs and bulldozers to resolve the problem of the illegal site at Crays Hill, but has never previously gone this far.

The e-mail read: "We entirely support the campaign, both on humanitarian grounds and for financial reasons.

"The Labour group on Basildon Council has never supported the actions of the current administration to remove people from their homes and the land they own.

"We will continue to show support for Dale Farm families."

She was responding to a campaign letter sent to all Basildon councillors.

It outlined two ways of resolving the matter without an eviction, including the approval of new planning applications for Dale Farm, or developing other camps in Basildon on Homes and Communities Agency land, such as at Pound Lane.

Councillors from every party have been copied in to the blanket e-mails sent by various human rights' groups.

It has been sent ahead of an update on the eviction plan to be heard at the full council meeting in the Basildon Centre on Thursday.

A number of travellers and their supporters have already indicated they wish to raise issues about the possible £13million cost of the eviction during public question time.

Tony Ball, Tory council leader, said: "This comes as no surprise as it was when Labour controlled the council in 2001 that no action was taken when Dale Farm was first developed.

"I would be interested to know the Labour group's policy on dealing with unauthorised development in the green belt and what is the view of Labour voters living near Pound Lane."

Mrs Gordon said the Labour group had always opposed the eviction.

She said: "What the Conservatives want to do will effectively bankrupt the council and we just can't afford it.

"On the humanitarian side, we would never look to remove people from their homes."

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